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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 42nd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. GUERRERO (Philippines)
(Vice-Chairman)

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In the absence of Mr. Piriz-Ballon (Uruguay), Mr. Guerrero (Philippines), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued)

Draft resolution on the Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women (A/C.2/47/L.39)

1. Mr. SLEEUWAGEN (Belgium), introducing the draft resolution on behalf of its sponsors, recalled that the Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women had adopted the Geneva Declaration for Rural Women, which stressed the importance of taking account of the role of rural women as economic agents and active members of society in the formulation of development strategies. The Summit had also established a follow-up mechanism to ensure the application of that principle. The sponsors hoped that the draft would receive the widest possible support.

AGENDA ITEM 78: DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (continued)

(a) TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/C.2/47/L.30 and L.32)

Draft resolution on the eighth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (A/C.2/47/L.30)

2. Miss JANJUA (Pakistan) introduced the draft resolution on behalf of the Group of 77 and expressed the hope that it would be adopted by consensus.

Draft resolution on commodities (A/C.2/47/L.32)

3. Miss JANJUA (Pakistan) introduced the draft resolution on behalf of the Group of 77 and said she hoped that the Committee would be able to adopt it by consensus.

AGENDA ITEM 87: SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (continued)

(b) SPECIAL PROGRAMMES OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE (continued) (A/C.2/47/L.20, L.25/Rev.1, L.28, L.36 and L.37)

Draft resolution on assistance for the reconstruction and development of El Salvador (A/C.2/47/L.25/Rev.1)

4. Mr. TATTENBACH (Costa Rica), introducing the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors, said that the armed conflict in El Salvador had claimed 70,000 lives and had destroyed much of the country's infrastructure. The international community should therefore provide material assistance and moral support for the reconstruction and development of El Salvador. The sponsors hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted without a vote.

Draft resolution on assistance to Benin, the Central African Republic and Madagascar (A/C.2/47/L.28)

5. Mr. AHMIA (Algeria) introduced the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors, who had been joined by Algeria, Angola, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau, Kuwait, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Suriname, Togo and Yemen. The serious economic crises of the countries targeted in the draft resolution had been exacerbated by natural disasters, and the assistance made available to them thus far had been inadequate. The resolution appealed to all those concerned to increase their assistance in response to the reconstruction and development needs of those countries, and he hoped that it would receive the broadest possible support from the Committee.

Draft resolution on emergency assistance for humanitarian relief and the economic and social rehabilitation of Somalia (A/C.2/47/L.36)

6. Mrs. HASSAN (Egypt), introducing the draft resolution on behalf of the sponsors, who had been joined by India, Oman and Singapore, said that she hoped the draft would be adopted by consensus.

Draft resolution on economic assistance to Vanuatu (A/C.2/47/L.37)

7. Mr. ASHE (Antigua and Barbuda) introduced the draft resolution on behalf of its sponsors, who had been joined by Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Cape Verde, China, Comoros, Cyprus, Djibouti, Fiji, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Jamaica, Lesotho, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, the Philippines, Suriname, Swaziland, Uganda, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. He called upon Member States that had not sponsored the draft resolution to assist Vanuatu in its time of need.

Draft resolution on assistance for the reconstruction and development of Djibouti (A/C.2/47/L.20)

8. The CHAIRMAN announced that Burkina Faso and Mali had become sponsors of the draft resolution.

AGENDA ITEM 89: TRAINING AND RESEARCH (continued)

(a) UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH (continued) (A/47/458)

9. Mr. HAMMARSKJOLD (Sweden) said that one of the most useful activities carried out by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) had been its pilot programme for training in peace-keeping operations, and Sweden had therefore welcomed the reference to that programme in General Assembly resolution 46/180. In planning organizational changes in UNITAR, careful consideration must be given to ways of optimizing the Institute's experience in that valuable area.

10. Mr. JENSEN (Representative of the Secretary-General) said that broad support had been expressed for the Secretary-General's proposals on UNITAR during the Committee's debate, in particular the proposal for resolving the Institute's debt problem by transferring ownership of the building in New York to the United Nations. In response to specific points raised at the previous meeting, he confirmed that the consultations called for in General Assembly resolution 46/180 had in fact taken place: in early 1992 a letter had been addressed to all Member States, the appropriate United Nations bodies had been consulted and the UNITAR Board of Trustees had reviewed the Secretary-General's proposals. All the views received had been taken into account in preparing the Secretary-General's report.

11. While the Secretary-General was committed to the need to provide training, he had also to work within severe financial constraints. The Secretary-General intended to continue training programmes in New York on multilateral diplomacy and peace-keeping, the precise modalities of which would be worked out in due course. The specific division of responsibilities between Geneva and the International Labour Organisation's International Training Centre at Turin also had to be determined. The Turin Centre had been chosen because it was the only campus in the United Nations system and its resources were not being fully utilized. The existing inter-agency programmes at Turin were consistent with the mandate of UNITAR in the economic and social sector and would not detract from the Institute's training activities in the field.

12. General Assembly resolution 42/197 had recommended the sale of the UNITAR building so that the proceeds could be used to repay the Institute's debt, with the balance retained as a reserve fund. Unfavourable market conditions had thus far militated against that course of action, and the only realistic option appeared to be that proposed by the Secretary-General, which was fully consistent with the recommendations of the high-level consultant.

AGENDA ITEM 78: DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (continued)

(b) FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/47/19 and Add.1, A/47/395)

13. Mr. LIFANCHIKOV (World Food Council) said that the eighteenth session of the World Food Council, held at Nairobi earlier in the year, had focused on the deterioration of the food supply in Africa as a result of the drought and had concluded that African agriculture required more effective and sustained assistance, particularly technical assistance. The session had also considered the potential for a "green revolution" in the developing countries and consultations in that regard were currently under way between the Council secretariat and numerous international and national institutions. Close consideration had also been given to the problem of migration and food security, and the secretariat was currently elaborating appropriate policies and carefully monitoring events in that area.

(Mr. Lifanchikov)

14. Recent changes in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States had caused some developing countries to fear that food resources might be diverted to the Eastern European region. While food supplies in that region had declined, there was no danger of famine, and the Council had established that the volume of grain and other food imports in those countries had even declined and so would not have a significant impact on the amount of food assistance provided to the developing countries in 1992.

15. There had been consensus at Nairobi that, despite a number of achievements, the Council had been unable to attain all its objectives and its future should therefore be reviewed in the context of the reforms currently taking place within the Organization. To that end, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of the World Food Council had been established to prepare proposals on enhancing the effectiveness of the Council's work. The Committee's conclusions were contained in its report (A/47/19/Add.1).

16. While Council members had agreed on the continued relevance of the objectives of the 1974 World Food Conference, opinions had differed as to the most effective institutional arrangements for meeting those objectives. The majority believed that the mandate conferred by the World Food Conference would be best implemented by a reformed World Food Council, but some countries maintained that the Council's mandate could be shared among other bodies, such as the Economic and Social Council, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

17. If the respective mandates of the various United Nations bodies concerned with food problems were clearly defined, the Council could be transformed into a "cabinet-level working body" serving the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council as a specialized political advisory arm on hunger policies. Over its 18 years of existence, the World Food Council had established firm links with all its member countries, and the redistribution of its functions among other agencies would entail no financial savings but would undermine work in the area of hunger and food security for a long time to come. A reformed Council could, on the other hand, make considerable economies by confining its ministerial sessions to a single venue, Rome, where it would benefit from the contributions to secretariat expenses pledged by Italy.

18. In conclusion, he noted the general agreement on the need to reform the Council and hoped that members would be able to resolve their differences, since only through their combined support could they assist the hungry of the world.

19. Mr. CLARKE (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that the World Food Council had fallen short of fulfilling its mandate. There was therefore an urgent need to improve coordination of work on food issues within the United Nations system, and he

(Mr. Clarke, United Kingdom)

regretted that the Ad Hoc Committee had been unable to reach broader consensus on the best way to proceed. The European Community and its member States agreed with the Ad Hoc Committee that the Council's future should be addressed in the context of the overall restructuring of the United Nations in the social and economic areas. They believed that the matter should be taken up in the appropriate forums dealing with the restructuring question and that due account in such discussions should be taken of the Ad Hoc Committee's report and of any guidelines on which the Council had reached consensus.

20. Mr. KARBASSI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the human tragedy brought about by the famine in Somalia was another vivid illustration of the world community's inability to ensure food security for all and eliminate death caused by famine and starvation. Indeed, severe drought threatened the lives of millions in the developing world, and the number of people suffering from chronic hunger and malnutrition continued to increase. To make matters worse, the countries which were struggling with severe economic and social crises were those where the prospects for recovery and growth were most uncertain.

21. His delegation strongly believed that the United Nations system-wide response to short-term crisis situations and longer-term food security challenges still left much to be desired. While the establishment of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the appointment of a high-level coordinator within the United Nations Secretariat were welcome developments, more strenuous efforts were required by the United Nations system as a whole in the areas of coordination, emergency planning and field operations as well as in hunger-alleviation policies and programmes.

22. His delegation fully supported the reform of the United Nations social and economic sectors and was encouraged by the strong resolve of the majority of World Food Council members to reform and revitalize the Council so that it could live up to the expectations of its founders. His delegation therefore viewed with deep concern the proposal by some members to dissolve the Council on the ground that its functions overlapped with or duplicated those of FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) or the World Food Programme (WFP). In his delegation's opinion, there had been little, if any, overlap or duplication. The World Food Council differed considerably from other agencies in that it was policy-oriented, non-operational and stood above institutional or sectoral concerns or interests.

23. Given the Council's significance, it should be retained as an independent entity within the United Nations system, strengthened by a radical reform of its working methods. A revitalized World Food Council would do much to help the United Nations reach the ultimate objective of the World Food Conference, which was the eradication of hunger in the world. To enable the Council to exercise its political authority and provide effective policy guidance and coordination, national committees to evaluate United Nations food agencies should be established and regional consultations for preparatory and follow-up

(Mr. Karbassi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

activities should be held. The Islamic Republic of Iran was ready to work in any way possible to ensure the revitalization of a body which it viewed as crucial to the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations system and urged other Governments to join in the reform efforts. To help the Second Committee reach consensus on a draft resolution, his delegation was also ready to consider proposals which accommodated the concerns of those wishing to dissolve the Council.

24. Mr. AHMIA (Algeria) welcomed the convening of the International Conference on Nutrition, which would take place in Rome under the auspices of FAO and should provide an opportunity for the international community to adopt concrete plans of action to control hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Indeed, the economic difficulties of developing countries, most of which were dependent on imports of agricultural products, had worsened because of those countries' heavy food bill. It was vital for the international community, particularly the United Nations system, to find ways and means of assisting developing countries which were net food importers.

25. The Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations was currently deadlocked owing to the lack of agreement on the draft final act on agriculture. Since 1986, the closure of the negotiations had repeatedly been postponed, and it was now necessary to conclude them in a way that took the interests of the developing countries into account. It was also vital that the draft final act on agriculture should include specific measures on behalf of net food-importing developing countries that would enable them to meet the cost of their food imports. It was also imperative to support the agricultural reform efforts of those countries through investment financing in the agricultural sector, technical assistance and the transfer of technology on preferential and non-commercial terms.

26. The fishing sector, like the agricultural sector, made a major contribution to food supply and economic and social progress, particularly in developing countries. It was therefore necessary that the Strategy for Fisheries Management and Development adopted by the 1984 World Conference on Fisheries Management and Development should be implemented. Specifically, its five programmes of action should constitute the framework for coordinating assistance for fishing activities in developing countries. His delegation hoped that the convening of an intergovernmental conference on fish stocks and highly migratory species decided upon at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development would allow Member States and the United Nations system, especially FAO, to formulate concrete recommendations on the management and exploitation of marine biological resources.

27. The situation of food and agriculture in various regions of the world, particularly in Africa, had worsened. Agriculture in Africa, which had the lowest percentage of irrigated land in the world, was currently facing serious climatic and financial difficulties, a situation exacerbated by the sharp drop

(Mr. Ahmia, Algeria)

in Africa's export earnings in the 1980s, the deterioration in its terms of trade, drought and desertification. Climate change, the lack of investment and external financial support had hampered efforts to increase production, while costly food imports added to Africa's already heavy external debt and debt-servicing burdens.

28. The expansion and development of the agriculture and fishing sectors must not have an adverse effect on environmental protection. Conservation of land and marine biological resources were common tasks for developed and developing countries alike. Agriculture should be restructured to accommmodate sustainable development and meet the needs of present and future generations.

29. Mr. BAILLARGEON (Canada) said that one of the most pressing problems facing the global community was the continuing lack of food security for many in the most vulnerable groups. The gravity of that situation, as tragically exemplified by the drought in Africa, demanded an intensified focus by the United Nations on food security problems. His delegation was therefore pleased that the Secretary-General was looking at the World Food Council in the context of his reform efforts. Previous reforms undertaken by the Council provided a firm basis for further action.

30. After listening to Council members' analyses of that body's problems, his delegation had concluded that ministerial attention and coordination had been inadequate and the analytic function replicated that of other agencies. There was an urgent need for a solution which would retain and strengthen the role of ministers in the area of food security policy while integrating the Council's analytic and coordination functions into FAO and the Economic and Social Council respectively.

31. His delegation sought to respond to the concern of some World Food Council members that the prominence of food security issues would decline without a specific agency to champion the cause. Accordingly, Canada recommended that food security questions should be given increased ministerial attention and prominence at a one-day meeting of ministers of agriculture that could be held as part of the biennial FAO Conference. The agenda would be confined to one or two items chosen in consultation with the Economic and Social Council. In addition, to strengthen the analysis of food security issues, a closer alliance could be forged between the World Food Council and FAO. With broader terms of reference, the FAO Committee on World Food Security could undertake a more comprehensive analysis of issues having an impact on global food security. Where FAO did not have the necessary expertise, it could request collaboration from other United Nations bodies that did. Finally, to ensure the integration of food security in development policy and the effective implementation of operational decisions, an essential role could be assigned to a revitalized Economic and Social Council and ACC. Those recommendations would send a clear signal to the hungry and malnourished people of the world that the United Nations system was ready and determined to respond effectively to their needs.

32. Mr. CAMARA (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)), after drawing attention to a FAO briefing note on the implications of the Uruguay Round negotiations for food security, noted that the FAO medium-term plan for 1992-1997 had the following cross-sectoral priorities: environment and sustainable development; policy advice; women in development; human resources development; and economic and technical cooperation among developing countries. FAO had played a critical role in ensuring the inclusion of agriculture in Agenda 21 and was making efforts to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. In coordination with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, FAO was providing assistance in the area of agricultural and rural development policy reform associated with macroeconomic stabilization, structural adjustment, transition to market economies and greater sensitivity to environmental and sustainability issues. The FAO/World Health Organization (WHO) International Conference on Nutrition to be held at Rome in December would be the first world-wide conference to focus on that critical subject. FAO worked closely with the World Bank and other lending agencies to foster sustainable agricultural development and provided direct assistance to developing countries through a number of special assistance projects. The ultimate aims of FAO were to promote agricultural production, ensure food security and guarantee a reasonable nutritional level for everyone.

33. World food supplies had improved remarkably in recent decades, thanks to the widespread adoption of more productive agricultural systems. Nevertheless, the most recent FAO World Food Survey indicated that there were still more than 500 million seriously undernourished people in the world and that structural adjustments were causing a gradual decline in nutritional levels in many developing countries. Structural adjustments were socially acceptable and economically viable only if introduced gradually over a period of time as part of a development strategy which guaranteed access to food to the poorest groups in society. Indeed, malnutrition was caused less by the material absence of food than by poverty. Even if poor countries accorded more priority and resources to agriculture, such assistance could never be more than a stopgap measure.

34. Above all, the developing countries needed trade to generate employment and hence income with which to repay their debts and assume responsibility for their own development. However, the terms of international trade were extremely unfavourable to developing countries, particularly to exporters of raw materials. Agricultural trade had stagnated for the past decade, and the prices of many commodities had reached unprecedented lows. Paradoxically, in an age of scientific and technological exploits and increasing economic interdependence, abundance and surpluses in some places existed side by side with poverty and deprivation in others. The means to win the fight against hunger and poverty were of a scientific, technical, economic and, above all, political order.

35. Mr. SERAJUL HUQ (Bangladesh) noted with concern that the volume of world food and agricultural production had fallen in 1991 for the first time since 1983. It was increasingly difficult for the developing countries to make

(Mr. Serajul Huq, Bangladesh)

progress in those fields because of unfavourable market conditions and declining international support. The decline in agricultural production in the developing countries directly affected the poorer sections of society, the vast majority of which lived in rural areas. Agricultural production could only be stimulated by comprehensively addressing such issues as poverty, birth control, illiteracy, health care, sustainable development and the status of women in rural areas. In addition, measures that could help to reverse rural-to-urban migration, which was a source of social destabilization, should be strengthened.

36. His Government had recently adopted a number of positive measures, including rural infrastructure-building activities, to ensure grass-roots participation in agricultural development programmes. It also sought to make credit available to the rural population through specialized banks. While food production in Bangladesh had nearly doubled in the past 20 years, efforts were being frustrated by population growth and periodic natural disasters. Fluctuating agricultural prices and limited market access had been an obstacle to increased production of certain cash crops such as jute and tea. Bangladesh had helped to establish a food security system within the framework of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

37. The World Food Council could improve its efficiency considerably by setting clear priorities and making extensive use of data, analyses and assessments of multilateral agencies with input from expert bodies such as FAO, as well as by making optimum use of its own resources.

38. Most developing countries were highly dependent on agricultural exports, while the markets of the developed countries were increasingly protected by tariff and non-tariff barriers. It was therefore essential to ensure an adequate flow of resources to and investment in the agricultural sector of developing countries and to increase market access for agricultural products from those countries. The technological means existed to produce enough food to feed the whole planet. All that was needed was the political will to break the vicious circle of poverty and economic decline.

39. Mr. GOUMENNY (Ukraine) said that, despite the progress achieved in the 1980s in reducing hunger and malnutrition, the international community was still a long way from solving the world food problem. In its report (A/47/19), the World Food Council had indicated that millions of people in the Eastern European region found it increasingly difficult to gain access to adequate food as a consequence of the transitional effects of economic reforms. That regrettably applied to Ukraine, which had been transformed by the command-economy system from one of the world's richest agricultural countries to an importer of basic agricultural commodities. It was to be hoped that through careful agrarian reforms Ukraine would attain agricultural self-sufficiency and become an agricultural exporter once again, to the benefit of the developing world.

(Mr. Goumenny, Ukraine)

40. In order to address the food problem, each country should mobilize its own resources and optimize its food potential, and international trade in foodstuffs should be enhanced by the elimination of discriminatory barriers, the correlation of food prices with those of industrial goods and the solution of the debt problem. His delegation supported the calls for a rapid conclusion of the Uruguay Round and the application of those rules to agricultural produce.

41. Ukraine favoured the development of multilateral cooperation mechanisms to resolve the food problem. Especially useful were the activities of the World Food Council, which deserved more active support from the international community and should, through the reform of the economic and social sector of the United Nations, become an effective instrument of the system. He called for enhanced coordination between the Council, FAO, WFP and IFAD, a question that should form part of the discussions on enhancing the economic and social sector of the United Nations.

42. Mr. REN Quan (China) said that despite some recent progress, the world still faced serious problems in the area of food and agriculture as a result of demographic pressures, the depletion of natural resources, degradation of the global environment and the irrational economic order and trading relations. Agriculture, particularly in the developing countries, played an essential role in providing employment opportunities and ensuring social stability and economic prosperity. The international economic environment and a just and rational international trading system were important guarantees for the sustained development of world agriculture and world food security.

43. He hoped that the impasse over the question of subsidies for agricultural products would soon be broken and that the Uruguay Round would be successfully concluded so that the terms of trade for agricultural products from developing countries might be improved. International development assistance should be further strengthened, and developing countries should fully tap their own potential and strengthen South-South cooperation in the field of food and agriculture. He commended the World Food Council on its valuable work and urged that body to enhance its efficiency and improve its working methods so as to effectively carry out its mandate as coordinator and policy adviser to other United Nations organizations in the field of food and agriculture.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.